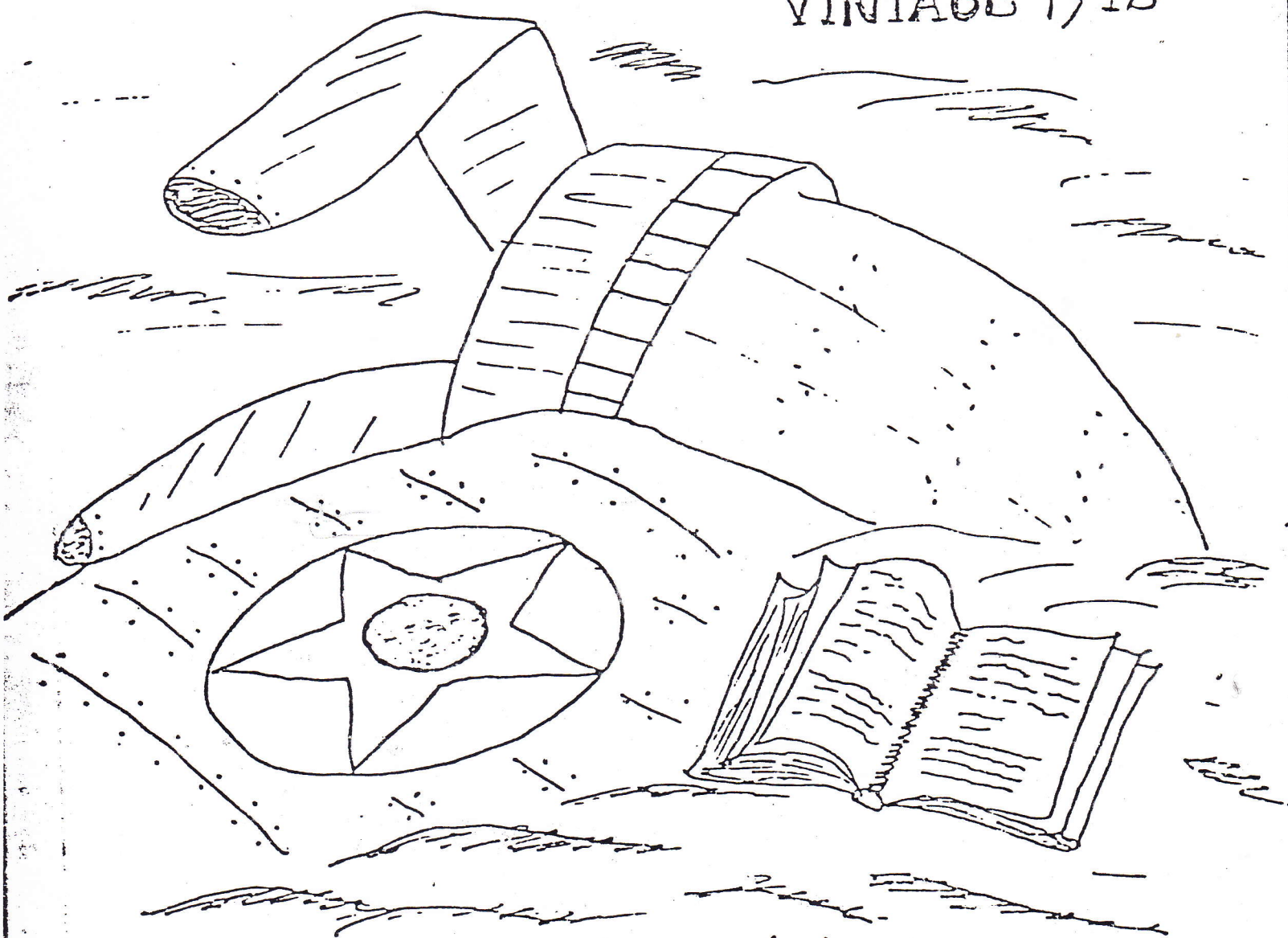


# A TRAGEDY ...

VINTAGE 1942



*from the diary of a pilot.....*

PRESENTED BY

THE 1932nd COMMUNICATIONS SQUADRON (AFCS)

GOOSE AIR BASE, LABRADOR, CANADA.

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High on the coast of Labrador, Canada, the icy waters of snow-fed streams flow to meet the sea through the steep, rocky walls of Saglek Fjord. Between June and October they flow, but for the remainder of the year all exposed water is frozen, often to the depths of several feet. Archaeologists have uncovered the residue of ancient residents who hunted and fished the waters of the fjord as early as 2580 B.C. Their stone hearth, with charcoal still intact, has been uncovered on Rose Island, in the mouth of the Bay.

Today, a small U.S. Air Force converted Radar Site houses a tropospheric communications link to the northernmost outposts of our hemispheric defense system; from the steep heights, U.S. Contractor Maintenance Personnel overlook the vast stretches of frozen tundra and infrequently visible blue-green of the Atlantic. On a flat stretch of this barren land, at the base of the steep bluff now crowned by a Radome and the concave, billboard antennae of the site, our story finds a setting. No more than fifty yards from the present site runway, lie the weathered remains of a B26 medium Bomber of World War II vintage.

On 30 November 1942, the 1800-foot cliff overlooking the ocean and Saglek Bay witnessed the beginning of a tragedy. Although only a few miles from an Eskimo village, none of the crew walked out. On December 23rd, three members started south in a boat that was part of the aircraft's emergency gear. They were never seen again. The remaining crewmen stayed with the downed plane, existing for months in sub-zero temperatures in the belief that help would arrive. The diary of the B26 Pilot has been retained intact - the last entry added in February of 1943.

The story begins at BW-1, Greenland, as the long arctic winter has shortened the days, and winter is closing in, as the seven-man crew await clearance for the flight home - first stop, Goose Bay, Labrador.



November 12, 1942

We're still sitting here with 16 minutes of daylight each day. We've less than six hours of daylight between sunrise and sunset now. Had about two inches of snow last night and everything was really pretty. Spent most of the morning sweeping it off the plane. They said that there's a chance of leaving tomorrow, but this place seems so much like home, that it doesn't seem like we should leave.

November 16, 1942

This place is full of changes. Yesterday afternoon, Jansen and I walked down to the river. There was a solid sheet of ice resting on the rocks, and it was covered with almost two inches of snow. Every once in awhile, we would break through up to our knees, but there was nothing under the ice. Last night, we had rain with a warm wind with gusts up to better than 60 miles per hour. So this morning, there was only isolated patches of ice left. Today was the first time in two weeks that we have been able to walk on bare ground. We've had all kinds of weather, most of the days were fairly warm. But one day it was six degrees. We've seen days when not a breath of air stirred.

November 26, 1942

I still say this is screwy weather. We were alerted this morning at 0330. There was a solid overcast. We killed time until 0600 when we got briefed. It was still overcast and seemed to be getting worse. The A-10's and B-25's started kicking off, but about then, it started to rain and the ceiling looked like it was very low. About 10 minutes later, it stopped raining, and an A-20 came over at 500 feet with room to spare. By 0830, the sun was shining and everything looked as nice as we could ask for, but it was too late to take off.

November 30, 1942

Took off at last for Goose Bay. About 1315, we ran into some clouds, and I turned around and called for the formation to turn around also. One plane dropped out. I think I saw the P-40's later. I lost the others while letting down below the clouds. We saw an opening to the south at about 2000 feet, and after flying in that direction, we broke out. We finally had to go back up to 13,000 feet, but it was clear sailing, so we kept on. Lt. Josephson gave me a new heading to get back on course, but we know now it was too much of a correction. About halfway, I picked up Goose Beam, but the set went dead after a few minutes. It was too late to turn back then, so we tried to get it on the compass, but couldn't. We finally hit the Coast. We decided

we were south of Goose Bay, so we turned north until we finally realized we were north. We were almost out of gas, so I started looking for a place to land. I wanted to get back to where there were trees, but the engine started missing, so we came back down. The Crew never batted an eye when they were told that we were going to have to make a crash landing. Even if I do say so myself, it was a good landing and Lt. Josephson did a good job of cutting the switch. We hit a rock that tore the bombay open and one prop tip went through the fuselage behind me. Outside of that, the ship was intact. It swung around almost 90 degrees without stopping, but made a good wind break that way; it was almost dark, so after eating a cold ration, we went to bed inside the ship; we had 17 blankets, a comforter, and a bedroll, but we slept very well. Lt. Josephson took a star shot and decided we were 300 minutes from Goose.

#### December 11, 1942

Lt. Josephson walked to the Fjord to the west, and Colm, the one to the east. We spent most of the day clearing up the ship and pooling rations in the afternoon. I climbed the mountain in front of us (where Saglek Air Station is now located), but didn't learn much. Nolan worked on the put-put all day without results. We cranked the dingy radio. It was pretty windy, so we spent the night in the ship.

#### December 12, 1942

Made three big improvements in our situation. Lt. Jansen and Colm discovered a lake close to our ship, and saw a fox. Way-wrench and I saw 50 seals; we know that there is food here. We made a lean-to out of tarp under the wing, and slept there. It was much better.

#### December 13, 1942

When the star shots were figured out, it showed us to be close to the town of Hebron. Worked on the put-put all day with no success, so we tried to work the liaison set on the batteries but they were too weak. We pooled our covers and slept together.

#### December 14, 1942

Wind blew all day with increasing velocity and snow. Our lake went dry so we were back to melting snow. We went to bed early.



December 24, 1942

Christmas Eve, and we've been here two weeks today. It was lonesome with just the four of us, but we got up pretty early and dug out the gas strainer so we could make a fire. It was so windy, we couldn't work outside, so we dried out the blankets. Golm got blistered pretty bad and swollen hands which have to be doctored. We stretched out our eating to cover most of the day. We had a sardine-sized can of herring with crackers, a spoonful of peanuts apiece, a black cough drop, and a caramel, a cup of grape drink, and plenty of coffee, using the same grounds over and over. It's really a surprise how much one can get from a small thing like a caramel, but we looked forward to it with anticipation each day.

December 25, 1942

What a Christmas! Mangins' feet pained him so much we had to get up at 0530. He was in agony before that, but was better after, although his arches pain him pretty bad. Got up again at 0900. Golm went exploring, I massaged Mangins' feet and Waywrench started fixing up the floor, which was in pretty bad condition from the fire. Later, we had to dig out the rear entrance to the ship to fix the window up. After that, we had a first-aid lesson. The only one who doesn't have anything wrong is me. We are about to eat our Christmas dinner and go to bed.

December 26, 1942

Had another swell day. The weather was perfect. Waywrench cleaned up the back of the ship, while Golm dug around in the rear of the bombay, uncovering a can of fruit cocktail and a can of chicken a-la-king. I worked on Mangins' feet and did some odd jobs. Everyone is feeling better, and I hope that Mangins will be up in a few days. We aren't starving by any means, but the conversations are mostly about food. One surely can remember some tasty food.

December 27, 1942

Started today as usual by treating the casualties. Mangins' feet are better, but we found a big blister on each foot. Golm and Mangins spent the day drying blankets. Waywrench finished cleaning out the back of the ship, and I climbed the mountain to see if I could see anything out to sea. I also took a roll of film. The enforced diet is beginning to tell on us, but we'll eat a little more tomorrow.

December 28, 1942

This has been a terrible day. The wind started up early in the morning and has kept us inside all day. We had two fires which took the rest of the day to repair. Mangins' feet are quite a bit better and he will start working on the put-put soon. We may get the liaison set going yet. In the meantime, we can feel the effects of the short rations more every day. We pray almost every minute that the boys in the boat will get through soon and get some help.

December 29, 1942

Today has been just average. The wind started up early again, but not too hard. Mangins' feet are almost back to normal.

(NOTE: THE FOLLOWING IS IN DIFFERENT HANDWRITING)

Yet, if the taste of kisses went and strawberries came the year around, half of the joy would be gone from the world. There is no wonder we kiss for when mouth comes to mouth in all its stillness, breath joins breath, and taste joins taste. Warmth is enwarmed, and tongues can move in a soundless language, and those things are said that cannot be said, have a name or know a life in the pitiful faults of speech. There is nothing to be done with the ear, so back we come to the organs of taste and smell. It is temple of the voice, keeper of the breath, treasures of tastes and home of the noble tongue. And its portals are firm, yet soft with the warmth of a ripeness unlike the rest of the face, rosy and in women with a conkling red tenderness of the taste, not to compare with the wild strawberry feeling and too far from the organs of taste and smell, and far from the brain, and an arms' length from the heart. To rub a nose like the blacks and it is better than nothing at all, but there is nothing to the taste about the nose, only an old piece of bone pushing out of the face, and a nuisance in time of winter, but a friend before meals and in a garden indeed. With the eye we can do nothing, for if we come too close they become crossed and everything comes twice and sight without good for one or all five, no angles with a fluring world yet this it was that left the grapes to weed. I had eaten of the tree. Eve was still warm under me, there is strange and yet not strange in the kiss; it is strange because it mixes stillness with tragedy and yet not strange because there is good reason for it. The hand is too hard and too used to doing all things with too little, and deeper and closer.

December 30, 1942

Today was overcast with snow showers. Spent most of the day working on the inside. Colm lost a fingernail, and ray lose another. I'm just thankful that his hand doesn't pain him. Worked a little on the put-put and made some progress, but it was too dark



ready to try again. We are just praying for good weather both in hopes of a rescue plane (if the boys get through). I am cutting down still on the rations.

January 5, 1943

It started off like a beautiful day, but turned to a light low overcast. Waywrench and I cleaned the plane of snow and Mangins finished the put-put, which seems to be in pretty good shape. It started clearing late this afternoon.

January 6, 1943

This is the eighth day of bad weather. The entrance is blocked, and it doesn't do any good to dig it out. It has been two weeks since the boys left and spirits are still high in spite of the bad weather.

January 7, 1943

We've been here four weeks today. The entrance was blocked up this morning. As I was going into the ship, I saw a little bird. We caught him and boiled him for a couple of hours. Then made stew by adding a bouillon powder. It was really delicious. Golm started to go looking for Hebron, but the snow was too soft. Mangins got out for the first time in 13 days. If we can't find a town or get the put-put going in three days, we are going to have to sit and wait until the weather clears and pray that the boys got through because we are too low on food to do anything else. God help us to get out of here safely.

January 8, 1943

Today was the most strenuous for me since we got here. I tried to get to Hebron, and I still think I know where it is, but there are two mountains in the way. I can feel myself growing weaker and we have less to eat every day. I don't know what we would do if we didn't have that three pounds of coffee. We sit around and drink that and talk about all kinds of food, but I think we all crave chocolate candy more than anything else. The boys have dug out the back of the ship so if tomorrow is clear, we still have one last try with the put-put radio.

January 9, 1943

Well, we put the put-put back in its place, and it jammed again, so that leaves us with one possibility, that the boys got through.

January 10, 1943

We have been here one month today, 31 days. Spent most of the day which was perfect as far as the weather was concerned looking for the plane and fixing up bandages. The boys' spirits were much higher today, after our little church service. Our only food today was a slice of pineapple and two spoonfuls of juice.

January 11, 1943

Our third day of perfect weather, also the coldest day since right after we got here. Spent the day watching for the plane which didn't come. The oil gave out on this side, which brings about another problem. The short rations are beginning to tell on us, but we are still in high spirits. If we don't live to eat some of the food we talked about, we've mentally eaten one of the best meals in the world.

January 12, 1943

Today was the boys' 20th day, our 33rd, and was overcast, but was calm. We got the oil almost dug out but are all so weak that we can hardly work. The boys' spirits are still high though, and we had a couple of lively bull sessions on our one topic, food. Our ration today was a slice of pineapple.

January 13, 1943

Another calm overcast day. We dug up the oil, dried out the blankets, made a new bed on snow, and ate our last food, a slice of spam and a soda cracker apiece. All we have left is a half pound of chocolates and three drink powders, but we talk like rescue was certainly tomorrow. It cleared off late this afternoon, so maybe there is hope for tomorrow.

January 14, 1943

Clear day, but with wind. We cleaned off the plane and waited, but nothing happened. Late this afternoon, we were playing cards, when Mangins oiled the gas too fast and caused an explosion which burned both his and my face, hair, and hands. Our rations were four chocolates, but we are still working out pretty well. After a devotional, we went to bed.

January 15, 1943

A perfect day as to weather, but the coldest since we got here. Spent most of the day trying to keep warm and listening for a plane. Also made big plans for a couple of days in New York when we get our furloughs. Rations were two chocolates and a bouillon



powder. No one is particularly hungry yet, but we are getting weaker and colder because our bodies aren't putting out enough heat.

January 16, 1943

Another calm clear day, but the coldest we have had yet. The oil froze up, so we had to end up by burning nothing but gas. The only thing we have left is one bouillon powder and two sticks of gum. The strain is beginning to tell, but we still have good bull sessions about food and the furlough in New York.

January 17, 1943

Couldn't have asked for a better day except that it is so cold that the oil is frozen and won't burn. So our gas is going pretty fast. Had our last food, bouillon powder, so unless rescue comes in a few days, ----- The boys have been gone 25 days which is a long time, but they are our only hope; our families will really miss some swell dishes and menus.

January 18, 1943

Cold and clear. My watch stopped, so we didn't get up until noon. Must be a little warmer because we got a little oil. Today was our first complete day without any food, but spirits are still pretty high. It's surprising how much punishment the body and mind can take when necessary. We are still in pretty good condition but rather weak. Not much hope left.

January 20, 1943

It snowed and blew all night, but we all slept pretty well, and we were much more cheerful today. We stayed up longer than we should have though, and are pretty tired. That snow has been blowing pretty hard all day and is piling up in front of the door, so I don't know what we will do if it doesn't stop pretty soon.

January 21, 1943

Six weeks today and rough night with snow and rain, so everything was soaked when we got up. Only Wayreneh and I got up and then only long enough to melt snow for water. Things could be worse.

January 22, 1943

Got up around noon, and was up until about 6. I cleared up the entrance and made the bed. We could stand some good weather.

January 23, 1943

Spent a miserable night. Everyone got crowded and nobody could get comfortable. Had a good day, but everybody is pretty discouraged, although the conversation was pretty good. We haven't really felt famished but we are really weak. It really gets me to see these boys start to do something and have to stop from the lack of power to go on. Waywrench has developed a case of piles and is really suffering.

January 24, 1943

Overcast but fairly calm. Each day we don't know how we can last another day, but each time we manage to go on. We all smoked a pipe of tobacco this morning and Golm got really sick, and I felt pretty bad. But we came out pretty well.

February 3, 1943

Slept a solid week in bed. Today Waywrench died after being mentally ill for several days. We are all pretty weak, but should be able to last several more days.

NOTE: This is the last entry in the diary. The men were found in the first part of March by Eskimos from Hebron and were only about three and one-half hours' walk from Hebron.

List of food when Landed:

7 cans of spam, 3 cans of peanuts, 8 cans of chicken, 2 cans of pineapple, 3 cans of fruit cocktail, 2 cans of datenut roll, 1 can of braun bread, 3 boxes of chocolates, 28 Hershey bars, 4 packages of dates, 1 pound of crackers, 4 boxes of fig newtons, 1 pound of cheese crackers, 1 case of coke, 2 cans of karon, 3 pounds of coffee, and 20 packages of caramels.